

DECEMBER 2023

Ladies Corner

Resilience Personified

Councillor Funky Banjoko's Impactful Leadership in Wood Buffalo

Inspiring the Next Generation of Black Youths

Déjà Leonard

Redefining Mental Health Care

The Trailblazing Work of Noreen Sibanda

Serving Up Solutions to Food Insecurity

Best Help Family Foundation

Empowering Alberta

Tanya Fir

Quarter Century of Impact

MCHB's Evolution in Multicultural Health with Yvonne Chiu - Executive Director, MCHB

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Leadership & Emancipation

Glimpsing into 2024

As I type these words from my window, I'm gazing out at a car park. However, if I shift my gaze to the north, I see the sun preparing to set, and light snowflakes gently falling. A family has just arrived, rushing indoors to escape the cold, seeking warmth. The trees in the distance have shed all their leaves, and it's evident that a light snowfall is on its way.

Reflecting on the year that has passed, it's been an incredible journey here at the magazine. Each edition has been crafted with love and gratitude. We've now arrived at a point where we can proudly announce that the gates are open, and the ancient mountains have moved. We are ready for 2024. As you read this edition, you may be in the midst of preparing your turkeys and wrapping Christmas presents. The question that lingers is: How different will 2024 be?

This year has brought both moments of triumph and times of sorrow. Regrettably, in October, we said goodbye to James Jarvis, our inaugural marketing manager. We take solace in the belief that he is now in a better place. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and all those who held him dear.

I believe that 2024 will mark our ascent, a year of significant transformation, especially here at the magazine. While I won't reveal too much at this moment, I extend my warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Happy Holidays!

Tee Adeyemo

**Founder and Editor-in-Chief
Ladies Corner Magazine**

"I extend my warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year."

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Tanya Fir



Funky Banjoko



Noreen Sibanda



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Serving Up Solutions to Food Insecurity

In Alberta, one in five households experience food insecurity. That means they lack reliable access to affordable, nutritious food because of financial barriers, systemic disparities and economic inequities.

T Calgary Foundation provided funding to Best Help Family Foundation to address needs in this complex issue by providing access to culturally appropriate food and support services.

With one of the largest Sudanese populations in Canada, Calgary is now home to many refugees who fled the civil war in South Sudan. "The community itself has a traumatic background of war, PTSD and a lot of child soldiers," says Dr. Akeir Kuol, founder and executive director of Best Help Family Foundation (BHFF). She advocates in the judicial, educational and government systems for Black communities and in particular, the city's South Sudanese population.

"Language and culture are big barriers," says Kuol. "A lot of South Sudanese just close the doors to finding resources and finding someone to help simply because they can't find people that look like them, who speak their language."

BHFF has helped 5,000+ families to date with food services and resource referrals as well as counselling services in various languages including Arabic, Swahili, Amharic and Nuer. Every week, BHFF used to distribute 100 food hampers but switched to provid-

"We have to tackle food security because some families don't know if they can afford to feed their kids or pay rent." - Dr. Akeir Kuol, Best Help Family Foundation

ing Superstore gift cards due to rising food costs. The cards allow families to buy culturally appropriate food including okra, molokhia (a type of spinach), lentils, fava beans and halal meats so they can enjoy traditional South Sudanese dishes.

Traditionally, in South Sudanese culture, a woman is expected to have many children. Adds Kuol, "More kids means extra costs for food and clothes, but things are so expensive right now."

"We have to tackle food security because some families don't know if they can afford to feed their kids or pay rent. The worry is always, 'If I don't pay rent, I'm gonna get kicked out. If I don't feed the kids right, they'll have malnutrition issues and Child and Family Services will come and take them away.'"

In addition to food support, BHFF helps families access critical services. Distributing hampers, and gift cards act as entry points for families to connect to mental health, financial literacy, translation services and support to navigate the courts and education system.



BHFF volunteer, Madalana John



BHFF founder and executive director, Dr. Akeir Kuol



BHFF founder and executive director, Dr. Akeir Kuol

Kuol, a youth and family counselor, established BHFF in 2020 after she helped a family with an incarcerated youth to navigate the judicial system. Word spread among Calgary's South Sudanese community and "the next thing I know, more and more families were coming to me asking for help," she recalls.

From cultural barriers and racism that affected employment, to housing and disproportionate rates of incarceration among South Sudanese youth, families voiced all sorts of issues. "Where we come from, the police are not our friend. Here, police are willing to lay down their life for you," says Kuol. She connected with the Calgary Police Service (CPS) to support probation officers and surveillance team members in taking a cultural approach with the South Sudanese community.

She continues to build trust and connections in her new position with the City of Calgary, working as a community liaison between the South Sudanese community and the CPS.

Kuol's role is indeed making a big difference.

Learn more at facebook.com/besthelpfamilyfoundation



Best Help Family Foundation volunteers: left-right, Achan Jal, Nemisa Simon, Madalana John, Sabrina Stans, and Benadita Nyiker. In front: Dr. Akeir Kuol, BHFF founder and executive director

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*Photo caption:
CBC co-founder and president, Chi Iliya-Ndule and
CBC co-founder and treasurer, Michael Lee Hing.*

Photo credit: Erin Brooke Burns

Inspiring the Next Generation of Black Youths

By Déjà Leonard • Photography by Erin Brooke Burns

According to City of Calgary data, 3.5 per cent of Calgarians self-identify as Black. Because Calgary's Black population is relatively small, it can be challenging to develop a strong sense of community. That's why the Calgary Black Chambers (CBC) works to create a unified, thriving local Black community.

CBC is a not-for-profit organization that looks to increase the leadership capacity of Black individuals by uplifting and supporting them in the community through volunteering, scholarships and more.

CBC operates under four main pillars: fellowship, mentorship, scholarship and advocacy. Recently, CBC has increased its efforts in providing scholarships to Black youth in Calgary, recognizing education is key to building strong and resilient communities.

The idea for the scholarships started during the pandemic, when CBC began collecting and redistributing funds, food and gift cards to people in the community who needed them most.

To formalize a scholarship program for Black youth, the Calgary Black Chambers Scholarship Fund was established at Calgary Foundation in late 2020.

"The goal is to provide scholarships so that finances will not be an issue for Black youth to progress, allowing

"The goal is to provide scholarships so that finances will not be an issue for Black youth to progress." - Chi Iliya-Ndule emphasizes the aim of the scholarship program in removing financial barriers for Black youth pursuing education.

them to focus more on studying because we find a lot of our Black youth are working part-time while going to school," says CBC co-founder and president, Chi Iliya-Ndule.

Statistics Canada data shows that while Black youth in Canada are as likely to graduate from high school as their peers, they are less likely to complete post-secondary education.

"We find that sometimes Black youth self-select out of scholarship applications because they think they're not going to get it," Iliya-Ndule says.

By creating student awards specifically for Black youth, CBC supports students directly, removing barriers and encouraging and empowering Black youth as they work toward their goals. This year, the scholarship fund provided 20 awards, totaling \$85,000 in funding for students.

The student awards are primarily supported through donations by Calgary corporations, organizations and individuals, and are awarded based

on academic achievement, financial need, leadership and community contributions in alignment with CBC's core values.

"We can help change the narrative and make the city more equitable and be the best place for Black individuals to settle in Canada when they arrive," says CBC co-founder and treasurer, Michael Lee Hing.

Iliya-Ndule and Lee Hing enjoy hearing about the impact of the scholarships via letters that award recipients send sharing their gratitude, and how the scholarships help to alleviate financial barriers and stress as students pursue their academic interests and career goals.

CBC aims to make Calgary a city where everyone can thrive. Its mentorship program is open to all youth and enables young people to connect with relevant professionals to learn and grow their skills before moving on to post-secondary education.

Lee Hing says this positive momentum helps create a better future for more people. "I would love for these students to, down the road, turn around and do the same thing. Get involved with community organizations and just help any way they can, whether it's financial or giving time."

Learn more at calgaryblackchambers.ca



Merry Christmas

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Empowering Voices

SISTERS DIALOGUE'S QUEST FOR CHANGE

Sisters Dialogue is a nonprofit grassroots organization comprising a diverse group of Muslim women based in Edmonton – Treaty 6 Territory. Their aim is to provide culturally safe spaces and support for racialized Muslim women and girls through a collaborative, women-centered framework. Aisha Ali, the President, explains that the organization began in July 2021 in response to attacks on Muslim women, specifically Black Muslim women. Their objective is to establish a secure community for Muslim women and girls by advocating for their rights, amplifying their voices, and addressing their concerns to enhance their overall quality of life.

“A primary focus of ours is taking up space, so Sisters Dialogue... is all about telling it like it is,” Aisha reiterates. Being Black and Muslim poses challenges, emphasizing the importance of a safe space. Conversations on this issue are needed, yet there appears to be more support and acceptance for all minority groups in Edmonton.

Challenges persist within the law enforcement system concerning relations with police, Blacks, Muslims, and women documenting these attacks.

“How can we allocate more resources and support in these spaces to improve lives and address basic needs? - A question posed by Sisters Dialogue emphasizing the need for more resources to enhance the lives of individuals, families, and communities.”

Genuine mental health data is necessary. The path to garnering more allies in the community starts with collective support among all groups. Accessible programs for education exist. Community goals can be achieved by consistent collaboration, introducing changes in education, medical practices, and government systems to disseminate messages that will evolve over time.

While there is some funding to aid Muslim women experiencing or having experienced trauma, additional resources are required to sustain these programs. Sisters Dialogue offers five free sessions with culturally sensitive therapists specializing in working with Muslim women. Healing circles, facilitated by art and trauma therapists, are

offered 3-4 times a year, positively impacting many women's lives.

The “Muslim Women Tell It As It Is” Anti-Islamophobia Awareness Campaign successfully launched citywide in August. The campaign's images now serve as a moving exhibit to continue discussions about Islamophobia. Some women in the images participated in focus groups that informed the campaign's themes. Ali emphasized the importance of amplifying the voices of Muslim women and girls to create a safer Edmonton and Alberta.

“Sisters Dialogue follows a ‘working from the ground up’ concept. How can we allocate more resources and support in these spaces to improve lives and address basic needs, from individuals and families to communities across Edmonton and the suffering province at large?”

There are several ways to assist this organization: donating funds, investing time in programs, reading material, or enrolling in the Structural Racism Course offered by the University of Alberta's Native Studies. Contributing via social media, visiting the website, and volunteering within the organization also support their ongoing work.



A JOURNEY OF COMPASSION AND SOCIAL IMPACT

CELEBRATING MANDLA

Mandla's Foundation is a non-profit organization established in 2019 following a tragic loss. Mandla, a remarkable 12-year-old girl from Fort McMurray, Alberta, left us too soon, leaving her family devastated. Inspired by Mandla's profound impact on her community, her mother, Mireille Zatcha, founded Mandla's Foundation to honour her memory. Initially a memorial organization, it has evolved into a community-serving organization.

Today, Mandla's Foundation is dedicated to serving people in Canada and abroad through various programs and events in education, health, and assisting those in need, such as low-income families, individuals experiencing homelessness, or facing financial hardship.

On March 9, 2021, Mandla's Foundation received a Proclamation, designating March 22nd as Mandla's Day in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in Alberta. Mandla's Day celebrates Mandla's impact and encourages youth involvement in community service and social activism, which she held dear. Her birthday, March 22nd, is now celebrated in her community and beyond.

Over the years, Mandla's Foundation has achieved significant milestones. In honour of what would have been Mandla's 16th birthday, Mandla's Founda-

***"Empowering Communities:
Mandla's Foundation
Champions Education,
Activism, and Compassion
Worldwide."***

tion carried out "16 random acts of kindness." Mandla's Foundation donated books on Black History and Social Activism to Dr. Clark School in Fort McMurray, served breakfast to homeless individuals at the Bissell Centre in Edmonton, and continued their Mandla for Education program by providing school supplies to students in Cameroon. A new initiative, Poetry Night, was introduced, providing a platform for poetry lovers to express themselves, promoting mental well-being.

Ecole St Paul School annually presents the Mandla Award to a student demonstrating values of social activism. Additionally, Mandla's Founda-

tion facilitated the provision of music instruments for various events, including Canada's Day, Women's Day, and politician candidate meet-and-greets, through their partnership with Oil-town Records.

The Foundation expanded its visibility by participating in networking events organized by new partners. At the year's end, Mandla's Foundation plans to complete its Christmas Toys Giveaway in Fort McMurray and Edmonton.

Recognizing the invaluable contributions of dedicated volunteers, Mandla's Foundation awarded volunteer certificates this year. The future looks promising for the Foundation, guided by the belief that "It's a great day to be a great person," just as Mandla exemplified.

EMPOWERING ALBERTA

Tanya Fir, Alberta Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

Ladies Corner met up to discuss provincial issues with Tanya Fir, MLA.

Funding: Alberta will be receiving 54 million dollars of funding over four years. The provincial government will be partnering with the federal government “to put together a national action plan 10 -year strategy that will end gender-based violence.” There is much work to be done “gaps to fill in, and root causes to be identified.”

There will be round table discussions, on-line surveys, and a telephone poll. The government is asking community leaders to inform their members, BIPOC individuals, refugees and immigrants or any under-represented group regarding this strategy.

Minister Fir is presently meeting with post-secondary individuals to gather more information and Minister of Advanced Education, Rajan Sawhney, will also be working on this project.

Israel: Minister Fir was honored and humbled to speak to a Jewish congregation on behalf of the provincial government recently and to let the Jewish community know that we stand with Israel and condemn the violent acts of Hamas. She and Premier Danielle Smith will be meeting on line with the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

Women and Girls: Recently, Ed-

monton celebrated “International Day of the Girl Child” and this month’s STEM week. Minister Fir indicates that the Alberta government believes that “women have an important part in writing the next chapter in Alberta stories.” Creating opportunities for all students is also vital to growth as a province in various fields where gender may be underrepresented. The government has invested 10 million dollars in women’s futures. She encourages BIPOC women to apply for scholarships at alberta.ca and to learn more.

Food prices: The federal government is working closely with major grocery store chains. The Alberta government has taken several affordability measures in the last couple of years to address personal finances.

Diversity and Multiculturalism: Resources and supports are available to all Albertans such as Premier’s Council on Multiculturalism, the Alberta Racism Advisory Council, as well as numerous ethnic and cultural anti-racism grants. The government wants to provide equitable opportunities for everyone “to participate in economic, social and cultural life” and ensure safety by addressing gender-based violence. Advisory councils and organizational meetings, informing and sharing information, only help to improve Alberta’s diverse population.

Black Artists and Writers Support: Writers are able to apply for



Tanya Fir, Alberta Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women

funding through Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Reaching out to Minister Fir’s department directly will enable writers to share views and feedback to support their work. Discussions that need addressing are diversity and equity, inclusion and accessibility through pluralism policies. The website that provides information is: www.affta.ab.ca/edia

Minister Fir is meeting with various Arts and Cultural organizations in Calgary and Edmonton to discuss making arts and culture as affordable to everyone across the province.

World Mental Health Day: “Taking time to do those basic but very important things in life from sleep and spending time with friends and family and ... doing the hobbies and interests that are important to you, like reading a good book or watching a movie,” is how Minister Fir deals with her mental health.

Resilience Personified

COUNCILLOR FUNKY BANJOKO'S IMPACTFUL LEADERSHIP IN WOOD BUFFALO



Councillor Banjoko is a politician who is currently sitting on the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Council representing Ward 1 – Fort McMurray. Seeing the need for more equality and diversity for minority and marginalized groups in this region, she represents the black community as a leader and has become the face for all peoples in this riding.

Born and raised in Nigeria, Councillor Banjoko completed her university education there, but continued her studies in England in purchasing and supplies through Shell, Nigeria. She lived in Nigeria and then moved to Chicago, USA and finally spent her last 14 years in Canada. Her parents were both teachers but it was her father's role as a judge and involvement in local government that influenced her to a degree with politics. Her father and mother served in both the church and community. Councillor Banjoko's mother was also a councillor in the local government. Besides growing up with parents who were "giving back", she saw the positive role of volunteering in Canada.

In 2021, during COVID, Councillor Banjoko took the time to research local politics. She saw it was a simple pro-

cess to run for office and an opportunity to give back. She listened to the voices in the community and those who believed in her. That was two years ago.

"No one rejects love and service," she shares. "This is common to all people; whether they are in Nigeria, England, the States or here in Canada." She is a leader who truly serves and believes

"Canada is an excellent country for immigrants because Canadians are accepting and accommodating."


that Canada is an excellent country for immigrants because Canadians are accepting and accommodating.

The municipality of Wood Buffalo has accepted and embraced Councillor Banjoko. She gives people time, attention and respect. "I like to brag about the love of the young adults – the teenagers and young kids – in this region. It's been amazing." She reiterates that this has been an amazing journey for her. Students ask for her to come to their schools and talk to them. The region is also made up of people

from all parts of the world. Councillor Banjoko has enjoyed living in Fort McMurray all these years working in the oil and gas industry.

One of the challenges that Councillor Banjoko encountered as she ran as an Independent was "Who are you?" She was well prepared as she knocked door to door during her campaign. For the most part, she was well received and working in pairs, the campaign teams were safe. She was very encouraged. Councillor Banjoko shares the story of her lawn signs disappearing when she ran for council. She found out later that kids were using them as art in their rooms. This "fired her up" and gave her the motivation to keep going. In May of last year, she ran for the position of MLA and even though she didn't win the position, she did win the popular vote with the youth. "I make enough good, positive noise" that people know who Funky Banjoko is.

The word that describes the residents of Wood-Buffalo region is "resiliency". In 2016, when the fires ravaged Fort McMurray, and more recently, the flood, people were ready to return, rebuild and reestablish their residency. People have a history and are willing to help each other out, regrow and

A portrait of Councillor Funky Banjoko, a Black woman with voluminous, curly brown hair. She is wearing a black blazer over a bright pink top with a large, ruffled bow at the neck. She is smiling and looking slightly to the right of the camera. Her hands are resting on her lap, adorned with a large, multi-faceted diamond ring on her left hand and a gold watch on her right wrist. The background is a dark, solid color.

“Plans for 2024: Bringing hope, infrastructure development, and support for the incredible people of Wood Buffalo.”

rebuild, Councillor Banjoko shares. The Municipality has supported small businesses, homes, churches, especially in the downtown area. The city matched grants to support as well. The desire is for people to live, work and prosper in the Wood Buffalo community.

Plans for 2024 include giving hope and providing support for the awesome people of this municipality, Councillor Banjoko shares. Her focus as a councillor has been the people, as well as making repairs, building more infrastructure, increasing entertainment and opening more stores; things that make people want to live in this region. Meeting medical needs is also a priority.

Councillor Banjoko is a “go go go person” who loves people. Prayer helps her and she enjoys celebrating life with people. Saturday mornings are for rest and reflection. There are no dull moments about Councillor Banjoko’s life as she ventures into another year as the representative and leader for her community of Wood Buffalo.



A Quarter Cent

"MCHB's Pioneering Role in Embracing and Promoting Multicultural Diversity and Leadership".

MCHB, or Multicultural Health Brokers, is celebrating its 25th anniversary! Yvonne Chiu, their Executive Director, spoke exclusively with LCCmedia recently.

There have been notable milestones over the past 25 years. Striving for equity and social justice, direct community accountability and internal democratic governance, the founding members of the organization registered with the provincial government as a worker's cooperative in 1998. This model supports the founding members' promise to strive towards true social inclusion of communities and co-create a work envi-

ronment that honors relationships.

Cultural Brokering practice originates from Anthropology, the study of humanity and what makes us human in relation to each other. The adoption of this practice rests upon the completion of a research study conducted by the Co-executive Director in 2003, Dr. Lucenia Ortiz. This marked the formal commitment by the organization to name, reflect and enhance this practice among all workers. Because Canada is ever growing in diversity and pluralism, "cultural brokers" emerged into the picture by supporting cultural differences, mediating conflicts and making positive

changes.

Another key milestone is the current efforts this year to partner with organizations committed to advancing cultural brokering practices across the nation in all relevant sectors such as health, settlement, education, children services, towards equity and social justice. MCHB Coop's role is to facilitate the co-creation of a training curriculum and a Community of Practice approach with a team of Cultural Brokers from different parts of Canada.

Originally, MCHB was founded to address specific health disparities in multicultural communities. Since



Oumalkhair Abdulla, Lydia Yip, Yvonne Chiu, Tigist Dafla, and Biruk Senbetu arranged from left to right.

Legacy of Impact

1998, guided by the radical principles of Health Promotion and the empowerment framework of Dr. Ron Labonte, MCHB has served thousands of multicultural families within many communities holistically and by generating relationships that catalyzed changes. Guided by the challenges and aspirations of the people the organization serves, they sought out formal systems (health, children services, family wellness oriented and senior-serving) which had mandates that resonated with such challenges and aspirations to develop collaborative relationships. In the process they developed a full spectrum of programs and services that cover the full life stages, addressing the unique

“MCHB: 25 years dedicated to equity, social justice, and true social inclusion within diverse communities.”

social determinants of health of communities, while supporting the families served through their journey from initial settlement to social inclusion.

MCHB has contributed to improving health equity and access to healthcare within multicultural communities during its 25 years of operation through the organizational structure and processes of being a worker’s cooperative. With a commitment to cultural brokering practices and

framing the work within the relational empowerment model, they have had success.

The impactful outcomes are demonstrated in MCHB’s mission to promote the health and wellbeing of multicultural individuals and families. The MCHB Coop founded its work on the most fundamental inequities: gender and race. The very first cultural brokers knew that pregnant newcomer moms were at their most vulnerable when they had limited access to health resources. MCHB’s work in connecting these individuals to perinatal health care, working with health service providers and most of all connecting moms with each other were and are essential in promoting and



Biruk Senbetu, Tigist Dafla, Yvonne Chiu, Oumalkhair Abdulla and Lydia Yip arranged from left to right.

sustaining maternal health and well being. The organization has built a wealth of knowledge from this foundational program that has shaped the practice, the range of services provided and most of all, strengthened the resolve to tackle systemic issues that impact the health of the population they serve.

Families carry resilience, strength, social capital and cultural wealth of different kinds; however, the difficult pre & post-migration realities and systemic racism have brought vulnerabilities into lives leading to poverty, social isolation, family disintegration and mental health challenges.

Other impactful outcomes the organization has been able to achieve have been done through collaborative practices with systems such as Children Services and education, as well as community mobilization within the multicultural communities tapping into the inherent strengths of the authentic leaders and social net-

work.

An example would be the Edmonton Public School system. MCHB had pursued in partnership with Baldwin School, a unique intercultural early learning program for 12 years from 2004 to 2016. This program supported culturally diverse children by affirming their cultural identities through programming that honoured their first languages and cultural wealth. It also supported the development of intercultural curiosity and relationships among the children of diverse backgrounds. Parents were co-creators of the programming.

Another example would be the 9 year formal collaboration from 2015 to 2023 with Children Services colleagues, whereby multicultural families touching child welfare are supported by MCHB to develop relationships and mutual understanding with Children Services colleagues. This helped them move through and out of the formal assessment process,

particularly when there were no child protection concerns. The families received holistic support from MCHB to address the vulnerable factors in their lives which brought them to the attention of Children Services. This collaboration is presently being studied by a team of researchers from several universities across Canada.

Currently, a team of MCHB's, who are part of and serving the Arabic-speaking, Eritrean and Spanish-speaking communities, are engaging their faith leaders in learning about the legal systems tied to family violence. The goal is to generate knowledge that could be shared within the communities to prevent families' involvement as well as the equitable navigation of the formal legal and justice systems tied to family violence.

Advocacy and community engagement have been vital components of MCHB's work and key advocacy initiatives and partnerships have contributed to the organization's successes.



Biruk Senbetu, Tigist Dafla, Yvonne Chiu, Lydia Yip and Oumalkhair Abdulla arranged from left to right.

Yvonne Chiu, Executive Director of MCHB, has played a central role in MCHB's growth and impact. She shares that the most difficult challenges have been associated with the limited understanding within formal systems regarding the life realities, strengths, as well as existential struggles of multicultural families and communities. This has caused the "case-by-case" and institutional and systemic misunderstanding of multicultural families, leading to the lack of culturally relevant care, programming and policies. Added to this is the lack of adequate funding to fully support the wellbeing of individuals and families within communities. This is illustrated in the limited collective efforts and will to address the issues of increasing housing and food insecurity caused by deepening poverty within communities despite existing strengths, social capital and collective efforts.

Despite these setbacks, some peo-

ple have made significant contributions to the organization. The most pivotal individuals on the team would be the 90 Multicultural Health Brokers who are in "the field", humbly and quietly serving over 2500 families within 30 ethnocultural and multicultural

"Future focus: Mitigating financial hardships, advancing mental health, and addressing systemic challenges within diverse families."

communities everyday. Their practice of cultural brokering which is holistic, family-centred and community-oriented, while continuing to be impactful, remains "invisible" and not fully understood & supported.

Furthermore, the two flagship programs and their success in alleviating poverty and effecting positive change within the community has been built

on the foundations of trusting relationships and deep knowledge that MCHB colleagues have with the individual and families that they serve.

The "First Step to Integration" Employment program focuses on community members, often women who have significant strengths from their pre-migration lives yet currently have limited English and exposure to the Canadian workforce. It provides workplace English language development, holistic support to address familial or life circumstances, factors that address barriers to employment as well and work skills development on-site at potential employers. Community members who participated in this program have had a high level of success in securing employment, often with the employers who trained them. Most importantly, the participants gain a more profound sense of confidence and capacity to do well in workplaces in their new country.

The Food Justice Program has four

pillars:

- “feed” through the weekly Grocery Run (support from Edmonton Food Bank, Leftover Edmonton and other partners) that provide around 200 families with food hampers,
- “grow” whereby families grow food during the growing season, through partnership with Explore Edmonton, Prairie Urban Farm, and other supportive partners.
- “Innovate” through the development and testing of prototypes guided by community members who are experiencing food insecurity such as the “Khair for All” good box,
- “advocate” through generating and sharing essential knowledge about the depth and nature of food insecurity within multicultural communities, such as conducting time-sensitive research about their experience with food insecurity, as well as community dialogue about culturally honouring solutions to food insecurity, such as the Persimmon Project approach.

Intercultural competence is central to MCHB’s approach. The organization has ensured that its services remain culturally sensitive and respectful of the diverse backgrounds it serves. This is through finding, recruiting and supporting linguistically and culturally diverse colleagues who are committed to their incremental development of cultural brokering practice in their everyday work in serving multicultural families and communities.

MCHB has promoted mental health awareness and improved access to mental health services within multicultural communities. This is done firstly through the involvement of 12 culturally diverse therapists within the Mental Health Program. They provide individual and family counselling to children, youth, parents and seniors.

Secondly, MCHB’s cultural brokering practice generates relationships of trust and safety with the families served, as well as through the power-

ful mutual learning and mutual support groups created by and for youth, parents and seniors. This has been an essential protective factor around mental health.

Thirdly, learning about and responding to the presence of past and present traumas in the lives of people who are being served and within the organization is part of human experiences. The experience of trauma could be the source of growth and transformation, and the belief that healing can happen through deeper understanding and mutual care and collective healing are also components of the mental health journey.

MCHB’s immediate goal for the next three to five years is to enhance capacities to address or mitigate the

“MCHB’s vision is to continue to make visible the true struggles, strengths and aspirations of communities and support community members’ authentic engagement in influencing policy change to address poverty and social/economic exclusion.”

impact of deepening financial hardships, deterioration of mental health and family wellness amongst multicultural families at the micro (case-by-case), meso (programmatic) and macro (sectoral or systemic) levels.

For the longer term, MCHB’s vision is to continue to make visible the true struggles, strengths and aspirations of communities and support community members’ authentic engagement in influencing policy change to address poverty and social/economic exclusion.

In addition to that, advancing the collective work with colleagues across the country and advancing the understanding, appreciation and formal recognition of the practice of “cultural brokering” as an essential approach is essential. This is to address equity and social justice in our country of pluralism and diversity, with both

historical and present-day disparities and exclusion of particular peoples.

Ultimately, the goal is to shift the overarching relational paradigm of multicultural families “becoming Canadian” to multicultural families co-generating with others the notion of being Canadian within the context of Canada being a multilingual and intercultural nation.

On November 28, 2023, there will be a special celebration in the company of the closest supportive colleagues from different levels of government and systems to mark 25 years of companionship and joint efforts joyfully.

MCHB will receive the Merit Award from the Alberta Community and Cooperative Association (ACCA) as a member on November 7, 2023.

The ongoing importance of addressing health disparities and promoting health equity, particularly within multicultural communities, is MCHB’s call to action. Taking on the essential elements of “cultural brokering” in everyday lives, is to be centred around the belief in shared humanity. Taking on the task of seeking out those whom we understand the least or who are most different from us is essential. MCHB takes time to reach out, share and listen to respective stories. In doing so, there is transformative learning in relationships. “We address disparities and inequity through one relationship to another, and we collaborate with and find allies in the system so they can be our companions as we continue to advocate for equity and inclusion in our policies and institutions.”

Community involvement and volunteer support are often instrumental in the work of organizations like MCHB. Anyone interested in the cultural brokering practice, wishing to learn about the life realities (strengths and struggles) of multicultural families, and interested in seeking creative and collective solutions to stubborn or emerging issues of social and economic exclusion through caring and honouring relationships is welcome to contact them at mchb@mchb.org.



Soaring Supermarket Grocery Prices!

NAVIGATING CANADA'S RISING COSTS IN 2023 WITH LORRIE MORALES

Whether you live in Halifax, New Brunswick or Edmonton, Alberta, everyone has noticed the increased cost of groceries. Instead of discussing just the weather, topics of conversation include the rising prices at the gas pumps, in restaurants and especially at the supermarkets. Depending on where a person lives, items vary in cost.

The average Canadian understands that the cost of food increases every year, but shopping for a family of four or individually, makes it difficult to make ends meet when other costs are rising as well. According to Statistics Canada, the average price of individual food items has risen between 5 – 7% in the last year. When comparing the average monthly cost of food in 2022, based on the average Canadian household, to the same amount of food purchased in 2023, it is almost \$300 more per month. In 2022, \$1,065.60 would buy the same amount as \$1,357.37 in 2023.

The question remains: why do these grocery item costs continue to increase? Politicians would suggest that inflation, that is generally about 2% per year, is now soaring at 8.1%

in 2023. Statistics Canada shares data through the CPI or the Consumer Price Index. This shows the changes in prices that Canadian consumers experience based on the cost of fixed goods and services over time.

The CPI goods and services basket is divided into 8 major components: Food; Shelter; Household operations, furnishings and equipment; Clothing and footwear; Transportation; Health

“Statistics Canada reports a 5-7% rise in food prices, leaving the average Canadian household spending nearly \$300 more on groceries monthly compared to last year.”

and personal care; Recreation, education and reading and alcoholic beverages, tobacco products and recreational cannabis. The data is published geographically.

When comparing staples in Canada, certain foods are priced higher than others in different provinces. According to Statistics Canada, each

city's grocery store or food and beverage store is different. For example, in Alberta, the average cost of ground beef was \$11.06/kg compared to \$10.60/kg in Ontario even though Alberta is known for its beef. A can of soup was \$2.03/284 ml compared to \$1.62 for the same item in Manitoba. And even though peanut butter and pasta are relatively close in price range, coffee in British Columbia was \$7.10/340g compared to \$5.76/340g in Saskatchewan!

The second question that consumers ask is how to save money when grocery prices increase. The following are helpful tips:

- Write a grocery list with essential items for weekly shopping.
- Meal plan for the week and only buy items for those recipes.
- Find coupons – online, in-store
- Buy items on sale
- Match prices by searching flyers
- Shop at stores that honor price matching

Because we have different grocery stores that have competitive pricing, find the right one for you and save on those soaring supermarket costs!



REDEFINING MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The Trailblazing Work of Noreen Sibanda

Born in Zimbabwe, but growing up in Canada, Noreen Sibanda has spent years supporting refugee and immigrant families. She has worked on youth participatory research projects with the University of Alberta; Community-University partnership; and coordinated summer youth programs. Noreen's passion has her working within schools and community-based organizations by offering counselling services. She created the Alberta Black Therapists Network (ABTN), a group of licensed and regulated professionals working in the field of mental health and addictions. Noreen is presently serving as the Executive Director of this organization. Holding a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology, a Bachelor of Arts, Noreen is a practicing Registered Provisional Psychologist presently working in Edmonton.

"Success is opportunity meeting preparation," Noreen shares. When she attended university, she started exploring various courses and "fell in love with psychology." Noreen was interested in understanding people's experiences and the ways they find and make meaning of those experiences. After obtaining her degree, she worked with immigrants settling into Canada. She felt there was a need for spaces where people could process their emotions and tell their stories. An experience that stands out for Noreen was at an elementary school when a young student simply found a safe space to experience his emotions without a word being said.

"Mental health and mental illness are different and need to be taken care of in different ways." - Noreen stresses the distinction between mental health and mental illness, advocating for tailored care approaches.

Noreen reiterates that mental health and mental illness are different and need to be taken care of in different ways. One in four Canadians will experience a mental illness at some point in their lives. There are many misconceptions about mental health in our society, but "you can experience depression and still hold down a job." Medication is able to assist a person to function. For example, with winter coming on, many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, (SAD) which affects individuals from warmer climates. The first sign of a person not

doing well would be a change in relationships, so let others know that you are noticing a difference in their behavior. Because we have “normalized” our stress load, we don’t know how to disengage from carrying the burden of “what is happening back home,” Noreen shares.

Every child has unique needs and experiences. Behavioral management plans need to be implemented and when all methods have been exhausted, then medication is perhaps needed. Teachers are engaged in ongoing professional development and are aware of research and new methods to implement in classrooms, but factors to take into consideration are: home life, conversations within the community, or even trauma information before we medicate children.

Mental health stigmatization is an ongoing issue as well as language we use when we are referring to various symptoms, labels and diagnoses. For example, “hearing voices in some cultures may be acceptable,” Noreen shares; however, it is a symptom of schizophrenia according to the DSM (Diagnostic Symptomatic Manual).

Noreen also shares that “our mental health is something that we take care of on an ongoing everyday basis.” Some of those skills include: getting enough sleep, eating, and disconnecting from the internet. Self checks might mean going for a walk, watching a comedy, talking with a friend and even taking a shower, cooking or baking and spending time with people we love.

Resources and support for people in the city of Edmonton to access would include seeing a therapist, free counselling sessions at the African Centre and Action for Health communities where individuals can see someone within 24 hours. Engage in the community and be aware of one’s “calling.” Tap into resources that are available on the internet will help with reducing stigma and isolation. Alberta Black Therapists Network is a space to inform people about events around the city, meet therapists from the ACB community and find resources.

Noreen’s advice to those who are intrepid about seeking professional health is to know that “you are not alone.” Healing can take place in relationships but the first step is realizing that you need the support.

Organizations are starting to recognize that programming needs to be more accessible for people’s different abilities and capabilities by meeting people where they are. Schools need to have these programs as well. People with mental health issues are capable of success, so instead of fighting the structures or systems in place, ask questions, because all people have unique experiences and a variety of holistic ways to take care of mental health. Talk about it and use language to express what you are going through. “We are so much more than what we just do.”



Noreen Sibanda



Noreen Sibanda



Noreen Sibanda



Crafting Change

Timiro Mohamed

Timiro Mohamed is a Somali-Canadian artist, Spoken Word poet, community educator, and political advocate. She is a former City of Edmonton Youth Poet Laureate. Being inspired by the storytellers before her, she has shared her voice with government members at multiple levels and was the recipient for the Alberta Council for Global Corporations Top 30 Under 30. She also co-developed an interdisciplinary theatre performance exploring Blackness using poetry, Caribbean dance and visual arts and competed internationally for her talent with Spoken Word.

Growing up in Edmonton, Timiro shares that oral tradition of “poetry is a very big part of Somali culture.” As a child, she recalls her mother taking her to a poetry evening. Timiro has always loved reading and writing, but that experience allowed her to think about exploring this genre more. Other artists inspired her, mentored, tutored, and created spaces for her to share and continue along the path of being a poet.

Timiro has used poetry as a language when she needs to express herself and reflect on the world around her. In her role as Youth Poet Laureate, this enabled her to share her writing about what was happening in the community and “present it before a body that had the power to do something about it.” Whether before City Council or Canadian Senate, using art as a political advocate has spurred her to become a voice for others.

Artists Collective is an exciting space composed of talented Black artists working toward a common goal,

speaking about their passions and “doing it in community.” Timiro indicates that the Collective is in early stages of collaboration but the core goals are “to platform Black artists and to also make art accessible to our communities” as a tool for healing, dialogue, celebration, and education.

Making this a self-sustaining career is a challenge for many artists; however, Timiro believes there needs to be more conversations around honoring Black artists’ time by providing an honorarium or paying them for their work. One space in Edmonton that honors Timiro and other artist’s work is “The Breaking Ground Art Collective.” Autonomy and safety in the spaces where artists gather is important to her.

Incantations of Black Love was released a few years ago and this multimedia collection – a blend of music and poetry – was an exciting endeavor. Feedback was positive and now, the challenge is to keep this work alive. Timiro is in the process of allowing her work to be enjoyed, platformed and honored.

Her energy is going toward “Breaking Ground” collective and producing commissioned work, yet staying true to her personal creativity. Timiro is new to making a livelihood as an artist yet her main struggle includes “staying the course” by bringing value to the world around her. Her most lasting contribution would be encouraging others to tell their story. She believes in the art she creates by getting inspiration from other artists but poetry will always “be my home.” @t.imiro on Instagram is where you can follow her into the future.





Lemonade Freewrite

Timiro Mohamed

This is an ode to the music of Solange's right hook, in honour of the song written solely for the Black woman.

I know echo and all its cousins.
Know how to be it and drip in it.
Know the white of empty vibrato.
Know how to scream into a room that will still be silent,
which is to say I am familiar with being talked over.

I watch as a procession of women walk directly into the water, or the wet of it.
Because here in this story we remain afloat.
We are women dressed in white but still breathing, and that is a prayer.

For the ones who know too much about whiteness and the finality of it, the way my ancestors lay in it, the way it put them in the ground.
Wrapped in hands, or the white of them; wrapped in a shroud, or the white of it.

I watch then as the mothers line up,
feel something try to claw itself up my throat.
Watch them, even in the pauses,
hold space solely for the exhale and inhale.
This is a prayer, the breath in our lungs.
They sit in their holy recite the names of their children like the wet rebirth of baptism.

I praise the song written solely for the Black woman.
Praise its joy. Praise every block where even the air is heavy.
Praise everything an ocean away that fits in the creases of a photo album.
Praise us.
Praise even the unravelling braid, even the napped-up edges.

I listen as Warsan's words come in on the last track, let them echo across a chasm, exploding backward into a room:
A controlled cacophony looping over and over, telling me to wake up, stop losing myself in noise or the white of it.

In my neighbourhood—which is every block where they season the food too much and you only eat sambuusi if there's hot sauce in the house, and there is always hot sauce in the house—in my neighbourhood, everyone is your family, is your cousin, is your habaryar, is an ocean away, or is in it.

In my neighbourhood, we pray that we may meet God whole.
Pray we will die ready.
Die with our children's children holding us.

Pray that maybe then, suspended in the moments before sunrise, we will welcome the silence.



The Glory Lives in Us

Timiro Mohamed

We emerged amongst an endless expense of memories.

Stories dating back centuries caught in the river's current.

Place ancestors coaxing the embers of an amber valley.

And us, a handful of cowrie shells tossed against a prairie sky.

Unending and invisible in the same breath.

Histories erased,

by the hands that to seek to shroud the sky

wash the blood memory from soil

and name us glorious and free.

Don't name us anything.

Somewhere in an alternate universe,

where you don't take us in the night,

our glory loud, heavy, endless.

We name ourselves,

yellow bloom reaching up to kiss the clouds,

she who came from a Black woman

birthed from a Black woman,

an afro unfettered expanding

evermore into a starless night,

and glorious and free by any name we choose.

Our glory,

a room full of Black folks,

grills catching the light, joy too big

laughing ourselves across worlds.

Braids beaded, hair wrapped, gold hoops,

name plates, bad bs, ghetto girls, too much,

me and all my people the blueprint,

and eloquent before you named us well-spoken.

When we gather,

we say land back and decolonize even our names,

we burn incense, break bread,

and everyone is always late,

Black infinitely beyond space and time.

Daughters of the dust,

birthed unto an already bright world,

a handful of cowrie shells tossed against a prairie sky

In every place marked by our names,

the glory lives in us.



Ginger Spice Cake

Makes 12 cupcakes or 2 round cakes

Ingredients

½ cup sugar (organic or white)

¼ cup maple syrup or maple butter

½ cup oil

1 cup flour

2 eggs

¾ cup molasses

½ cup apple sauce

1 tbsp cinnamon

½ tsp cloves and all spice

2 tsp baking soda

3 tbsp grated ginger

Directions

Heat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Line the cupcake tin with liners or bottom of round cake pans with parchment paper.

Mix oil, syrup, sugar, applesauce and molasses in a bowl.

Sift flour and spices in another bowl.

Bring 1 cup of water to boil and add baking soda to hot water mixed with molasses mixture. Stir in the grated ginger. Gradually whisk dry ingredients into the molasses mixture. Add eggs and thoroughly combine all ingredients.

Pour the batter into tins and bake – 20 minutes for cupcakes and 35 minutes for cakes. The top should spring back lightly or the toothpick comes out clean.

Cool for an hour before icing with Cream Cheese icing. You may also serve with whipping cream or decorate with sprinkles or candy cane pieces. Enjoy the deep flavor as a dessert or with a coffee.



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